

## ESV Introductions to the Books of the Bible

### *Hebrew Wisdom Literature*

#### **JOB**

Considered both a theological and a literary masterpiece, the book of Job is an honest portrayal of God allowing a good man to suffer. The test of Job's faith, allowed by God in response to a challenge from Satan, revealed God's loving sovereignty and the supremacy of divine wisdom over human wisdom (personified by Job's friends). Believing that God is good despite the apparent evidence to the contrary, Job rested in faith alone. In the depths of agony he could still proclaim, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25). In the end God silenced all discussion with the truth that he alone is wise (chs. 38-41). Yet he vindicated Job's trust in him (ch. 42), proving that genuine faith cannot be destroyed. The unknown author was probably an Israelite writing sometime between 1500 and 500 b.c.

#### **PSALMS**

The book of Psalms is filled with the songs and prayers offered to God by the nation of Israel. Their expressions of praise, faith, sorrow, and frustration cover the range of human emotions. Some of the Psalms dwell on the treasure of wisdom and God's Word. Others reveal the troubled heart of a mourner. Still others explode with praise to God and invite others to join in song. This diversity is unified by one element: they are centered upon the one and only living God. This Creator God is King of all the earth and a refuge to all who trust in him. Many of the Psalms are attributed to King David. The writing and collection of the Psalms into their present form spans the fifteenth to the third centuries b.c.

#### **PROVERBS**

Practical wisdom for living is the central concern of the book of Proverbs. We are told that the beginning and essence of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (1:7; 9:10). Proverbs often contrasts the benefits of seeking wisdom and the pitfalls of living a fool's life. While the wicked stumble in "deep darkness" (4:19), "the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" (v. 18). Proverbs is a collection of Israelite wisdom literature, including an introductory section (chs. 1-9) that gives readers a framework for understanding the rest of the book. The book includes the work of various authors, but much of it is attributed to King Solomon. It dates from between the tenth and sixth centuries b.c.

#### **ECCLESIASTES**

Ecclesiastes contains reflections of an old man, the "Preacher," as he considered the question of meaning in life. He looked back and saw the futility ("vanity") of chasing after even the good things this life can offer, including wisdom, work, pleasure, and wealth. Even if such things are satisfying for a time, death is certain to end this satisfaction. In fact, God's judgment on Adam for his sin (Gen. 3:17-19) echoes throughout the book (especially 12:7). Yet the person who lives in the fear of the Lord can enjoy God's good gifts. Young people, especially, should remember their Creator

while they still have their whole lives before them (12:1). Traditionally interpreters of Ecclesiastes have identified the "Preacher," who is also called "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1), as Solomon (tenth century b.c.).

### **THE SONG OF SOLOMON**

According to the most common interpretation, the Song of Solomon is a collection of love poems between a man and a woman, celebrating the sexual relationship God intended for marriage. God established marriage, including the physical union of a husband and wife (Gen. 2:18-25), and Israelite wisdom literature treasures this aspect of marriage as the appropriate expression of human sexuality (Prov. 5:15-20). The Song of Solomon has also been understood as an illustration of the mutual love of Christ and his church. It is possible that Solomon (tenth century b.c.) is the author (1:1). However, this verse could mean that the Song was dedicated to Solomon or was written about him, and therefore many scholars regard the book as anonymous.

### **LAMENTATIONS**

The book of Lamentations is made up of five poems, each an expression of grief over the fall of Jerusalem. Like a eulogy at a funeral, these laments are intended to mourn a loss—in this case, the loss of a nation. The latter half of chapter 3 implies that the purpose behind the book's graphic depictions of sorrow and suffering was to produce hope in the God whose compassion is "new every morning" (v. 23) and whose faithfulness is great even to a people who have been condemned for their own unfaithfulness. The author, while not identified in the book itself, may have been the prophet Jeremiah, who was said to have "uttered a lament for Josiah" (2 Chron. 35:25). Lamentations was probably written shortly after Jerusalem's fall in 586 b.c.

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